

Preparing to say Goodbye

At some stage in our pets' lives we are likely to be placed in the position of having to make the decision to euthanize them. This is always a difficult decision to make. It is always hard to know just how much discomfort our pet may be in – often they are very good at concealing signs of illness until it is very advanced. The most important thing is to try and assess their quality of life, and make sure you feel that the good times are outweighing the bad. Watch for changes in activity levels, appetite, or interaction with other members of the family.

If you have concerns that your pet may be starting to struggle, it is always worth discussing this with the vet. There may be more we can do to improve their quality of life, or we can help you decide when the time is right to say goodbye.

Where is best?

In the majority of cases, we perform euthanasia at the surgery. We can often schedule this for a quieter time of day, for example the end of surgery. Some animals get stressed by coming in to the practice, and owners prefer to have the procedure done at home, which is something we can certainly accommodate.

Do I have to be there at the end?

If you would like to settle your account prior to the procedure taking place this is possible, so that you do not need to think about this at a later date.

There is no right or wrong answer to this question. Some people decide that they want to stay with their pet throughout the procedure, others prefer to say goodbye before or after. The decision is entirely yours; let the vet or nurse know what you decide.

What will happen?

You will be asked to sign a form of consent for the euthanasia. We will also ask what you would like to happen to your pet following the euthanasia. Most people opt for a communal cremation, where animals are cremated in a group, and ashes are not returned. Another option is an individual cremation, where your pet's ashes can be returned to you in a casket or scatter box to keep or spread as you choose. There is a considerable extra cost involved with this service. Occasionally, owners prefer to bury their pet at home (this must be done at a depth of 5-6 feet). Others will have a preferred pet crematorium that they wish to use.

If you do not wish to stay for the procedure or see your pet afterwards, you are then able to leave.

A small patch of fur will be clipped from your pet. For dogs and cats, this is often on the forelimbs; for horses, the neck and for rabbits, the ear. A nurse will then raise the vein to allow the vet to inject the drug. This drug was formerly used as an anaesthetic, and therefore your pet will quickly become unaware of what is happening. Usually by the time the injection has finished, your pet will have passed on. If they become distressed by being held, or the scratch of the injection, we may give them some sedation to calm them.

If your pet is very old or frail, their veins may be too delicate for the injection and the vet may have to inject into another area of the body. Due to the nature of this type of euthanasia, owners often decline to stay, preferring to say goodbye beforehand.

With small animals, for example rats, hamsters or gerbils, we anaesthetise them first using anaesthetic gas. For health and safety reasons, we are therefore unable to have owners present at this time.

Occasionally, after your pet has passed away you may see some minor muscle tremors, twitching or a gasp. This is due to relaxation of muscles and is nothing to be concerned about. The vet will listen to your pet's heart to confirm they have gone. Their eyes are likely to remain open and there can be loss of bladder/bowel control.

If you would like to spend a short time with your pet once the procedure is complete, please let the vet or nurse know.